

Richmond – San Pablo AB 617

Assembling a Technical Advisory Group

Q&A

In December 11, 2019, Steering Committee (SC) members will vote on the assembly of a technical advisory group (TAG) for our AB 617 initiative. This document aims to provide SC members with information to better understand the concept of TAG, and addresses questions and remarks raised by SC members following the first presentation of TAG at our November meeting. At the end of the document a few examples of TAGs from relevant projects are presented, including links for further reference.

What is TAG?

A Technical Advisory Group (TAG) is a group of independent experts working together alongside the main activities of a project, to ensure high quality and transparency of the technical aspects of a project. Assembling a TAG is often a standard process for projects that have complex technical components. These experts provide additional sets of eyes to verify that all the finer technical details are optimally designed and aligned with project goals and mission.

Is the SC committed to TAG and its members in any way?

No. The TAG provides guidance and is not a decision-making body. The SC will choose topics they would like the TAG to discuss and evaluate. The SC can then decide which opinions or recommendations to adopt, and which not to. Moreover, the SC can decide, at any point, to dismiss the TAG or any of its members.

What type of input can the TAG provide to the Steering Committee?

The TAG is intended to deliver independent advice on the optimal steps needed to reach our goals, point out limitations, and respond to topics we may raise. The goal of the TAG is to provide the SC with recommendations and information on technical aspects of the project, such as monitoring approaches, data assimilation and scientific interpretation of the data.

For example, the next steps for our CSC are to use what we learned from the focus area activities and choose which monitoring methodologies to use. We can ask TAG members to evaluate different monitoring options. The TAG can provide us with answers to questions such as: Did we select the most appropriate sensor locations to measure the type of air pollution we are focusing on? Will the sensors we selected utilize the best methodology available to measure this entity? Will these measurements deliver data that will optimally inform us on public health impacts?

How will the TAG be established, assembled, and maintained?

If we choose to establish a TAG, the next step would be to decide what it will look like. We can copy other TAGs (see examples below), and/or alter them to fit our needs, or create our own approach.

Usually, TAGs meet every other month or quarterly for one to two-hour long meetings. Meetings are non-formal and are open to all SC members and the public. By establishing a TAG, we will have a list of dedicated experts that are familiar with our project and can be also contacted over the phone or email as needed, and asked to provide their expert opinion and advice on a specific topic we are discussing.

To simplify and expedite the process, if the TAG is approved, interested SC members will meet and discuss how to assemble our TAG – which experts to include and what are a few agenda items for the first meeting.

Would the TAG create additional levels of bureaucracy? Can it slow down the process and waste money?

The TAG will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the AB 617 structure and process. The idea is to take the complex, technical discussions that can be lengthy and interest only a small number of SC members out of our monthly meetings. TAG meetings will provide a space for detailed discussions with dedicated scientists, technical experts and agency representatives led by a smaller group of SC members, although all SC members are invited to attend and take part in TAG meetings. These SC members will then bring the concluding recommendations from TAG back to the SC.

Usually, experts sit in these meetings as part of their work and will not require consultancy fees. A few experts have already expressed interest in engaging with our community initiative and contribute their knowledge and expertise to our process. Depending on the meeting location, a small fee for meetings may be required (but not necessarily).

How would the TAG differ from the CERP work group?

These are two different entities. Once our SC decides we're ready, we will move from a Community Mentoring Plan to a Community Emission Reduction Plan (CERP), regardless of whether we have a TAG or not. If we have a TAG, these experts can continue to work with us once we become a CERP. Their assistance would be just as valuable for a CERP as it would be for our monitoring plan.

Will TAG discount community scientific knowledge, and how can it align with community efforts?

AB 617 provides community members with the power to make decisions for themselves, choose actions that will improve the quality of our air, and decrease the adverse impacts on the health of our communities. It is essential that external scientists and experts will not take over this process. However, we cannot disregard the high level of expertise, time and effort required to prepare a monitoring plan, and later, an emissions reduction plan. It is essential, therefore, that we have an open communication channel with experts that will allow us to tap into their knowledge when needed. It is also important that we maintain control over this process. To ensure this, TAG will not be given any decision-making capacities, and will be guided by the SC on the content and topics to be evaluated. The TAG can only enhance our decision-making and deepen our understanding by hearing as many perspectives as possible.

What are some examples for other AB 617 communities and grantees that have established TAGs?

1. [West Oakland Indicators Project \(WOIP\)](#), information provided by Ms. Margaret:

“We have long-term relationships with several scientists and organizations we have been working with over the years and refer to with technical questions. These includes representatives from our [Bay Area Air Quality Management District](#) (BAAQMD), the [Environmental Defense Fund](#) (EDF), academic researchers and industry representatives. Overall there are 5-6 advisors that are invited to the co-lead team meetings as needed. The co-leads meet with them about once a month and discuss technical aspects of the modeling and assessment of the community emission reduction plan. Some examples for topics these experts where asked to address are: How many trucks go through our streets? If these trucks where upgraded to cleaner technologies, what impact would that have on our air quality? How many people have been admitted to hospitals in our area? This information was passed on to the Steering Committee at monthly Steering Committee meetings, where draft ideas on how to proceed with technical assessments were discussed.

There are no expenses related with working with these advisors. Actually, often they came to us with funding they had and asked to run their projects in our area.

Advising with the experts cause no delay in the process because we tell them what we want them to talk about and we tell them they have to talk in non-technical language.”

2. [Physicians, Scientists, and Engineers \(PSE\)](#), information provided by Boris Lukanov:

“We have 5 members on our TAG, all are affiliated with UC Berkeley - professors in public health, environmental science, etc. (See list [here](#)). We communicate through emails, occasional phone calls and in-person meetings of the whole TAG, as needed. We discuss technical issues related to the project, the overall plan, strategies for data quality assurance, and more.

There are no costs associated with these advisors, just for refreshments during the occasional TAG meetings. We do not experience any bureaucracy or slowing down of our processes as a result of the work with TAG and feel that the TAG produces value to our process.”

3. [Groundwork Richmond](#), information provided by Matt Holmes:

“We have a group of 3-4 experts that work with us through Ramboll, our technical partner. Their expertise includes atmospheric chemistry, modeling, data science, environmental justice, and network deployment. We also work with the City of Richmond Environmental advisor on the installation of the monitors, and data presentation, and consult with the Union of Concerned Scientist on modeling health impacts and regulations.

We have a group call every other month, but also talk more often as needed and according to the changing needs of the project.”

4. The [South Coast Air Quality Management District](#) has a [TAG](#) for their three AB 617 Community Air Initiatives. The TAG has 18 members overall, and includes three members from each SC, and experts from agencies, technology companies, and academia, including an atmospheric scientist, sociology and ethnic studies scientist, preventive medicine expert, environmental health scientist, city and port representatives, and others. They meet approximately once every three months at the

Air District offices. Some examples of topics covered: emission inventory and chemical transport modeling, laboratory capacities, proposed general monitoring approaches cons and pros, options for source attribution methodologies, emission forecasting and regulations, and more. The meetings are open to the public and also live-streamed and available to watch [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#), and meeting agendas, presentations and summaries available [here](#). These meetings usually start with a community monitoring plan update followed by technical presentations, Q&A, and public comments.

5. The [Imperial Valley AB 617](#) has hired [Comite Civico del Valle](#), an organization serving communities for the establishment of Environmental Justice projects that also partners with researchers, academia, and government agencies, as their technical advisory group.

The [Sacramento Metropolitan](#) AB 617 SC is now considering assembling a TAG.

It is important to note that CARB and [Tracking California](#) recommend that AB 617 communities establish TAGs.